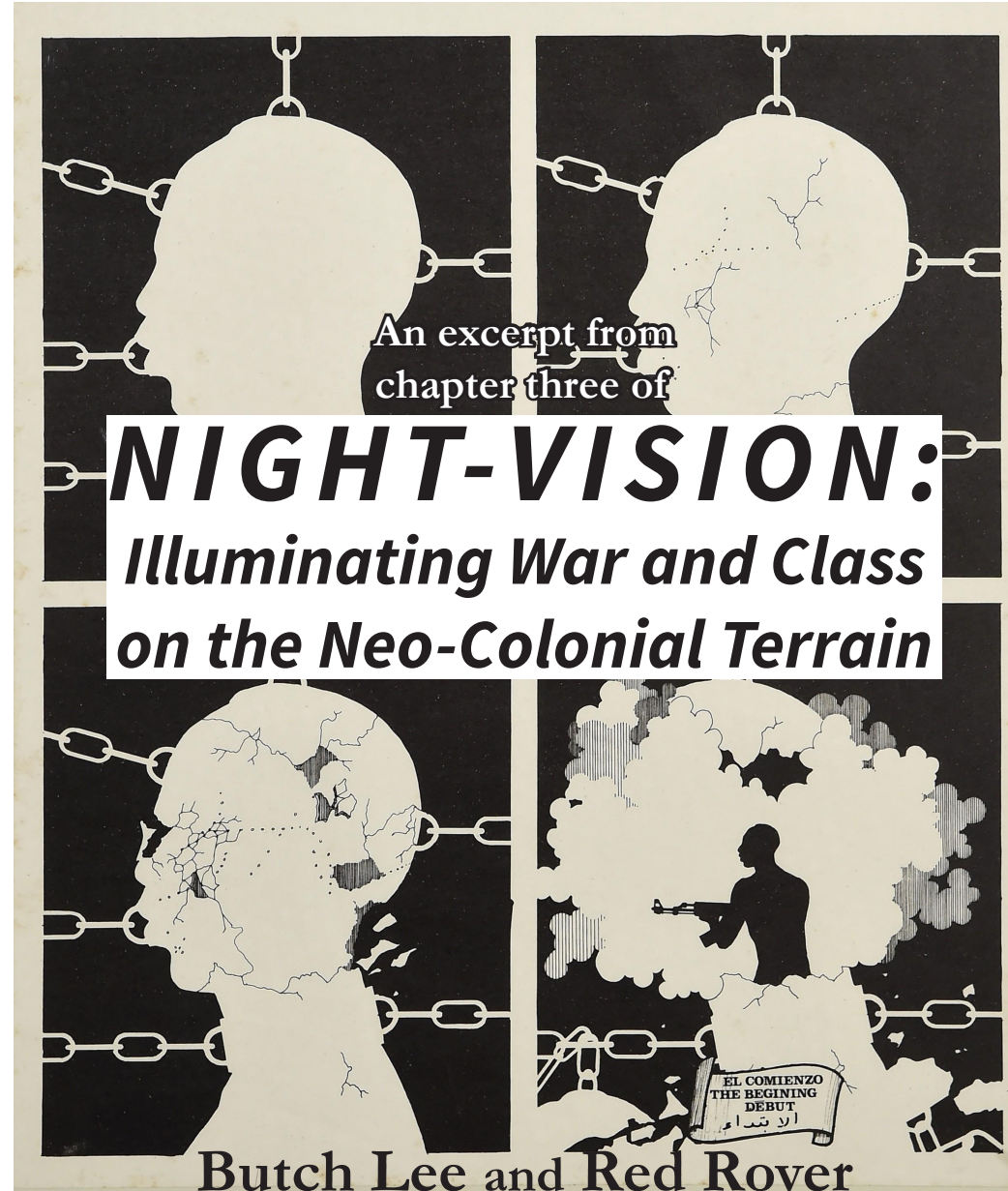


# IMPERIALISM AND THE ANTI-COLONIAL REVOLUTION

*A transformation of such magnitude did not go unnoticed by revolutionaries, although there was a strong tendency to interpret the neo-colonial changes as mere trickery, as cosmetic changes. We greatly underestimated the massive class changes about to happen.*



by monopoly capital. While the Trilateral Commission is concerned with maintaining imperialist harmony over the so-called free world, in actuality it has concerned itself with both domestic and foreign affairs. In one of its documents, the *1980 Project*, it is stated that the purpose of the commission is ‘to develop new ideas and institutions which can channel and control change in the international system.’

“Thus, the authors of this document state: ‘It must therefore come to grips with strategies for modifying the behavior of all relevant factors in the international community—individuals, governments, agencies within the government, elite groups, industrial firms, interest groups, mass societies, and other groups and organizations at the subnational and transnational level.’ One of the key questions addressed by the Trilateral Commission is the question of how to minimize conflict and maximize cooperation among the nations of the imperialist bloc, so as to insure the growth and survival of monopoly capital. The question of governability is thus at the core of the plans of the commission.”

as a class—constitutes the dilemma of the petty bourgeoisie in the general framework of the national liberation struggle. The positive solution, in favour of the revolution, depends on what Fidel Castro recently fittingly called development of revolutionary consciousness. This dependence necessarily draws our attention to the capacity of the leaders of the national liberation struggle to remain faithful to the principles and the fundamental cause of this struggle. This shows us, to a certain extent, that if national liberation is essentially a political question, the conditions for its development stamp on it certain characteristics that belong to the sphere of morals.”

At this writing, Guinea, for example, is a neo-colonial military dictatorship minus any liberation party at all. The neo-colonial petty-bourgeoisie, whether in Beijing, in Managua, or Atlanta, in real life returned towards imperialism as fast as possible. Cabral’s heritage has been to pose the right questions, looking from the colonial era into the uncertain neo-colonial future. The flow of insights into neo-colonialism has kept on. Well over a decade ago, the most perceptive began pointing to many new developments inside capitalism as substantive. The brilliant Greek economist Arghiri Emmanuel (who was one one of those mutinous Greek soldiers in the North African desert) said in the 1970s that imperialism was actually more and more at odds with its white settler servants, and was starting to abandon them to their fate in country after country.

In his testimony before the U.N. decolonization committee, in August 1978, Dr. Jose Lopez of the Puerto Rican Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional said that the neo-colonial changes hadn’t changed the imperialist system’s reach for concentration/centralization of power over the entire world:

“The victory of the Indochinese people over u.s. imperialism was a turning point for the future of imperialism. This is evident in the fact that in 1973, David Rockefeller called together the Trilateral Commission. If one studies carefully the documents of this commission, one is amazed at how well the world has been planned

# IMPERIALISM AND THE ANTI-COLONIAL REVOLUTION

An excerpt from  
chapter three of

## ***NIGHT-VISION: Illuminating War and Class on the Neo-Colonial Terrain (1993)***

by

**Butch Lee and Red Rover**

Cover: “Day of World Solidarity with the Struggle of the People of South Africa, June 26” by Olivio Martínez, 1974

service of imperialism who have learned how to manipulate the apparatus of the state—the African petty bourgeoisie: this is the only stratum capable of controlling or even utilizing the instruments which the colonial state used against our people. So we come to the conclusion that in colonial conditions it is the petty bourgeoisie which is the inheritor of state power (though I wish we could be wrong). The moment national liberation comes and the petty bourgeoisie takes power we enter, or rather return to history, and thus the internal contradictions break out again.”

Cabral’s only answer was to modestly hope that the moral development and cultural loyalty of the middle classes to its people would protect them:

“To maintain the power that national liberation puts in its hands, the petty bourgeoisie has only one road: to give free rein to its natural tendencies to become ‘bourgeois,’ to allow the development of a bourgeoisie of bureaucrats and intermediaries in the trading system, to transform itself into a national pseudo-bourgeoisie, that is to deny the revolution and necessarily subject itself to imperialist capital. Now this corresponds to the neo-colonial situation, that is to say, to betrayal of the objectives of national liberation.

“In order not to betray these objectives, the petty bourgeoisie has only one road: to strengthen its revolutionary consciousness, to repudiate the temptations to become ‘bourgeois’ and the natural pretensions of its class mentality; to identify with the classes of workers, not to oppose the normal development of the process of revolution. This means that in order to play completely the part that falls to it in the national liberation struggle, the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie must be capable of committing suicide as a class, to be restored to life in the condition of a revolutionary worker completely identified with the deepest aspirations of the people to which he belongs.

“This alternative—to betray the revolution or to commit suicide



struggle in the neo-colonial case.

**“Another important distinction to draw between the colonial and neo-colonial situations lies in the prospects for struggle. The colonial case (in which the *nation-class fights* the repressive forces of the bourgeoisie of the colonizing country) may lead, ostensibly at least, to a nationalist situation (national revolution): the nation gains its independence and theoretically adopts the economic structure it finds most attractive. The neo-colonial case (in which the class of workers and its allies fight simultaneously the imperialist bourgeoisie and the native ruling class) is not resolved by a nationalist solution: it demands the destruction of the capitalist structure implanted in the national soil by imperialism and correctly postulates a socialist solution.”**

While Cabral is often quoted, he is rarely discussed. The reason is that his ideas and life are uncomfortable, not soothing but too honest and hard-headed. Cabral brushed aside the usual dishonest rhetoric in which new “socialist” or “nationalist” states are said to be ruled by “the people,” the “proletariat” or “the peasant masses,” whose representatives and leaders are always these nice men (never women from the petty-bourgeoisie with offices in the capital, a full package, bodyguards, and villas.

To Cabral the no. 1 question was which class would run the new society, and he said everyone should be honest and admit that in his country it wasn’t going to be the oppressed. He was raising questions—the right questions—that the world is still trying to answer.

**“Our problem is to see who is capable of taking control of the state apparatus when the colonial power is destroyed. In Guinea the peasants cannot read or write, they have almost no relations with the colonial forces during the colonial period except for paying taxes, which is done indirectly. The working class hardly exists as a defined class, it is just an embryo. There is no economically viable bourgeoisie because imperialism prevented it being created. What there is is a stratum of people in the**

Colonialism reached its logical conclusion in imperialism, the monopoly stage of capitalism that first began in the 1890s. It was imperialism itself, out of its own internal contradictions, that gave rise to its great opposite, the anti-colonial revolutions of 1945–1975. From that dialectical unity came neo-colonialism.

For over four centuries, the european colonial system had expanded, attacked, occupied until it monopolized the entire human race within it.

Even the smallest white nations could have colonial empires if they wished. Tiny Belgium, which for most of its history was only a dukedom, a province, or a colony itself of Austria or Holland until it first became a nation in 1830, colonized Zaire in central Afrika along the Congo river. That one colony with its large outpouring of gold, silver, copper, aluminum, petroleum, coal, cobalt, manganese, diamonds, coffee, cotton, and other natural wealth, was larger and a dozen times more valuable than Belgium itself. Backward, unindustrialized little Portugal, the poorest country in western europe, could still own four colonies in Afrika and its island colony of Macau in China. So when it came to the major powers, these empires were vast. Great Britain owned one-quarter of the earth and compared itself proudly to Rome. France, a country the size of Texas, occupied Indo-China (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia), many islands in the South Pacific, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco in North Afrika, and perhaps one-fifth of all Black Afrika. By the Berlin Conference of 1894, in which the european powers divided up Afrika and apportioned it out between them, essentially the entire globe was owned by one socio-economic system. Imperialism had claimed every person, every piece of earth, every tree, and every stalk of grain in the world.

Imperialism as a stage is characterized by monopoly capitalism, which carried the tendency within capitalism towards economic concentration to new heights. In each capitalist nation, industries became dominated by giant corporate monopolies under the coordinating rule of finance capital. In 1901 the J.P. Morgan banking house merged what had been the industry-leading Carnegie Steel and other steel companies into

one monopolistic entity, named U.S. Steel. The same happened in u.s. automobile production, where the 108 firms that existed as late as 1929 were merged and winnowed to make only 44 in 1934 and effectively the big three a few years later (with their market protected by a 45% u.s. import tax on autos). Monopoly was the rule in colonial markets as well. There was no new geography for capitalist nations to conquer, no frontier to expand into, since all were held or dominated by one capitalist nation or another.

Up to 1945 the history of western imperialism was a pattern of ever-growing crisis. Vast industrial production in the metropolis only feeding a cycle of larger and larger, see-sawing swings of economic boom and depression. The intensifying capitalistic rivalry for markets and colonial raw materials was only resolved by war, since national monopolies prevented any real marketplace competition. In his 1916 study of imperialism, the Russian revolutionary Lenin concluded that this seemingly inevitable cycle of capitalist wars and crisis made imperialism the final and even “decaying” stage of capitalism. That was a widely-shared judgment.

Economic rivalry on a national basis ran the white man straight into two world wars, where the have-not powers led by Germany (without enough colonies to push their way to the top) felt compelled to make war on Britain, France, and the u.s.a., who already held most of the colonial world. By the close of World War II in 1945, this imperialist “progress” had led to the ruin of many capitalist classes, the devastation of europe itself, over 60 million deaths worldwide in the seven years of war, and the rise of a “socialist camp” over one-third of the world. It is doubtful that western capitalism could have survived another round of that.

It didn't matter, since a new force changed the equations of world power, the oppressed themselves. Imperialism, in so violently welding together the world, had exposed people to new ways, new sciences, new social reorganization. It had, in short, given a political education to the oppressed and colonized. Anti-colonial movements of a new type started and soon gained mass followings. In country after

altered class relations on a world scale that changed the political balance. The new post-colonial states, relying on national pride, absorbing of former militants into state employment, and development of native class difference (sounds familiar?), changed the framework of struggle from a “nationalist” one to one requiring an anti-capitalist solution:

“In the neo-colonial situation, the more or less accentuated structuring of the native society as a vertical one and the existence of a political power composed of native elements—national State—aggravate the contradictions within that society and make difficult, if not impossible, the creation of as broad a united front as in the colonial case. On the one hand, the material effects (mainly the nationalization of cadres and the rise in native economic initiative, particularly at the commercial level) and the psychological effects (pride in believing oneself ruled by one's fellow-countrymen, exploitation of religious or tribal solidarity between some leaders and a fraction of the mass of the people) serve to demobilize a considerable part of the nationalist forces.

“But, on the other hand, the necessarily repressive nature of the neo-colonial State against the national liberation forces, the aggravation of class contradictions, the objective continuance of agents and signs of foreign domination (settlers who retain their privileges, armed forces, racial discrimination), the growing impoverishment of the peasantry and the more or less flagrant influence of external factors contribute towards keeping the flame of nationalism alight. They serve gradually to awaken the consciousness of broad popular strata and, precisely, on the basis of awareness of neo-colonialist frustration, to reunite the majority of the population around the ideal of national liberation.

“In addition, while the native ruling class becomes increasingly ‘bourgeois’ the development of a class of workers composed of urbanized industrial workers and agricultural proletarians—all exploited by the indirect domination of imperialism—opens renewed prospects for the evolution of national liberation. This class of workers, whatever the degree of development of its political consciousness (beyond a certain minimum that is consciousness of its needs), seems to constitute the true popular vanguard of the national liberation



his people from oppression.

Cabral was notoriously impatient with abstract Western questions about “Marxism” and abstract notions of politics based on 19th-century Europe. He saw that under colonialism the whole colony became a “nation-class,” that revolted against imperialism as an oppressed class. Peoples or tribes were functionally as classes to him, in addition to all the urban classes created solely by capitalism. The communal Balantes became the main force of the liberation struggle, while the Islamic Fula, being the most indigenously capitalistic in their culture, were the most pro-Portuguese. When young Fula women trying to join the guerrillas were being captured and given to men as slaves by the Islamic authorities, Cabral had to personally lead liberation forces to tell Fula chiefs at a meeting: *“We aren’t going to permit that anymore.”*

To Cabral’s insight, the weakness of colonialism was that it united whole populations against it by even denying its own native allies and servants their class ambition. It squashed society into a horizontal structure, a “nation-class.” Neo-colonialism, he saw, tried to correct this weakness by giving way to or even pushing some sort of national liberation!

**“This is where we think there is something wrong with the simple interpretation of the national liberation movement as a revolutionary trend. The objective of the imperialist countries was to prevent the enlargement of the socialist camp, to liberate the reactionary forces in our countries which were being stifled by colonialism and to enable these forces to ally themselves with the international bourgeoisie. The fundamental objective was to create a bourgeoisie where one did not exist, in order specifically to strengthen the imperialist and the capitalist camp. This rise of the bourgeoisie in the new countries, far from being at all surprising, should be considered absolutely normal, it is something that has to be faced by all those struggling against imperialism.”**

Cabral was the first to comprehend neo-colonialism as a new stage, with

country, uprisings and guerrilla wars broke out. A young Black minister in Montgomery, Alabama spoke for the world majority: *“We have a determination to be free in this day and age. This is an idea whose time has come.”*

World War II was itself a catalyst, a great accelerator of power changing hands. Colonial rule tottered. In Hong Kong, in Burma and Singapore, in the Philippines and North Africa, native crowds watched as “their” white soldiers, disarmed and cast down, were marched through the streets by their captors. The mystique of white-ism was punctured. Locked in a life and death total war, the imperialist combatants drew their colonial subjects into the world war. As colonial troops, military porters and laborers, new industrial workers. Tens of thousands of African men were recruited from different African colonies to fight in Burma. Many more Asians and Indians were given rifles and told to defend their British masters from the advancing imperial Japanese army.

Contradictions were aching, at the breaking point. There were armed mutinies among the British Indian regiments in Burma and the Greek divisions with the allies in North Africa. Black sociologist St. Clair Drake tells of how one group of black GIs in the south Pacific stepped away from their anti-aircraft guns to watch Japanese zeroes and U.S. marine fighters mix it up in an aerial dogfight—loudly cheering on the Japanese pilots: *“Go get that white boy!”* Then, as a Japanese plane neared, jump back to duty and start throwing flak up at it. There was a major spontaneous uprising in Harlem in 1943, and in the Detroit race riot that same year thousands of whites and blacks fought it out in a chaotic free-for-all (34 killed and hundreds wounded). In the great Black novel of World War II, Killens’ *And Then We Heard the Thunder*, his story concludes with thousands of New African servicemen on leave in an Australian city defending themselves with rifles in a spreading firefight against the white GIs and their U.S. army as the city burns in race war.

Imperialism found that it could not contain the new revolutions. In Algeria, the French army and white settlers killed one million Algerians, one-tenth of the population, during the 1954–1961 revolution and still could not find victory. In Vietnam, the French colonial army

again killed one million Vietnamese and by 1954 had been defeated. Followed by the amerikans, who fought the longest war in u.s. history, killed hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese and lost as well.

Thirty years of continuous fighting in Vietnam, from 1945 to 1975, ended in suburban white flight. In the Delta, in Detroit, in Birmingham, anti-colonialism was an idea whose time had come.

A people, after all, who can boycott the entire city bus system, who set up systems of armed self-defense, are a people who can potentially take the power in their own hands.

1945 marks the beginning of change to a neo-colonial world order. Exhausted and bled by war, the other imperialist nations gradually let the u.s. empire introduce a new system that emphasized imperialist unity over rivalry. Wars between nations of white men over colonial markets and resources was replaced by NATO, by the U.N. and the World Bank, by the International Monetary Fund, the Group of Seven, the Common Market, and the Trilateral Commission. **The key to unity, the u.s. ruling class understood, was decolonization.** Only by sharing former colonies and opening national markets to corporations from different nations, could imperialism forestall the savage national economic wars that were inevitably resolved on the battlefield. That decolonization opened up europe's Afrikan and Asian colonies to u.s. economic penetration was an added blessing in Wall St.'s plans. That this would someday mean giving up an increasing wedge of their u.s. home markets and real estate to British, Japanese, and German corporations was something that didn't occur to them in their yankee arrogance.

A quick way to get an overview of the change so far is a comparison table:

dollars in the vanguard, with Armstrong as her aid and American negro diplomats, scholarships, the emissaries of the Voice of America..."\*\*

It was Amilcar Cabral who best identified in that time the key questions of the change from colonialism to neo-colonialism. Cabral was from the small educated class in the Portuguese Afrikan colonial empire. His schoolteacher father named him after Hamilcar Barca, the great Afrikan general who had led Carthage into war against the Roman empire (*his* son was Hannibal). Cabral became an agronomist and chief of the agricultural survey in Guinea-Bissau, one of the highest-placed Afrikans in the Portuguese colonies. He was also secretly the leader of the clandestine liberation army, PAIGC (which he founded in 1956 with only five others), and from the start of actual warfare in 1963 to his assassination in 1973 led the guerrilla army in its victorious struggle for independence.

Cabral was perhaps the most extraordinary revolutionary leader of his generation. Certainly, as a political-military genius he far outpaced persons with larger reputations, such as Shaka Zulu or Napoleon. His real parallels are Moshesh of Basuto or Mao of China. Cabral's uniqueness doesn't fully come through in print because his writings are only a shadow of the concepts he brought alive in practice.

Guinea at the time of the 1969 U.N. survey had a population of only 530,000. It had no remote mountain ranges for guerrillas to hide in. It was occupied not only by settlers but by 35,000 Portuguese soldiers, with NATO aircraft and weaponry. There was one Portuguese soldier for every seven Afrikans. A seemingly impossible situation. And yet, under Cabral's innovative leadership, PAIGC destroyed the colonialists. Doing so while keeping to Cabral's standard that Afrikan casualties in winning the war should be *no higher* than in "peacetime" before the war began. That is all another story, but we mention it only to indicate that his theories flowed from an intensely practical class struggle in freeing

\*\* Jazz great Louis Armstrong was sent on a "friendship" performance tour of Afrika by the u.s. state dept. at a time when the u.s. was busy assassinating Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba of the Congo (now Zaire). He later resigned when the u.s. failed to protect civil rights activity from violence.



France weak from WWII, still hungry for its colonial past, was being kicked and shoved unceremoniously into the modern neo-colonial era. United States foreign policy as “the leader of the free world” was starting to insist on neo-colonial reforms. Washington wanted to ingratiate itself with the anti-colonial feeling coming to the surface, especially in Afrika where Amerika itself had no colonies to lose.

In 1956, old and new collided head-on at the Suez Canal, newly nationalized by Egypt’s radical president, Gamal Nasser. French and British paratroops, together with ‘Israeli’ tanks, seized the canal in a surprise overnight attack. Their surface aim was to restore the canal to the old British and French colonial owners, their deeper aim was to do what Bush did in Iraq, end their “Vietnam syndrome.” In a public spanking of the three governments, the U.S. Eisenhower administration (which was Republican) joined with the U.S.S.R. to back Nasser and demand unconditional withdrawal. Humiliated, the French, British, and Zionists had to follow Washington’s orders and give it up. It was bruising notice for French imperialism of its second-rateness, as well as a measure of how committed U.S. imperialism was to coldly clearing the deck of old colonial situations that had outlived their usefulness.

A U.S. imperialism that was prepared to do that to its own white citizens hardly hesitated to whip the British and French into de-colonizing, also. This was the same conservative Republican Eisenhower administration, remember, whose supreme court in 1954 ruled school segregation illegal. An administration that sent the U.S. army’s 82nd Airborne to take over Little Rock, Arkansas, and escort Black teenagers into white schools surrounded by bodyguards of bayonet-waving white paratroopers. Imperialism was leaning on its Southern white settlers to get with the new program, to decolonize New Afrika before it was too late.

Fanon understood that the U.S. was leading the way to cutting short the anti-colonial revolution. He thought it a sign of what was to come that Senator John F. Kennedy, the young star of liberal U.S. politics, had openly criticized French efforts to hold onto Algeria. In Black Afrika, Fanon wrote, “The United States had plunged in everywhere,

Imperialism in the Colonial Era	Neo-Colonialism
National Corporation	Multi-national corporations and joint ventures
As many colonies as possible	Decolonization into neo-colonies
Unrestricted trade wars and national monopolies	Managed world trade and lowering of trade barriers
World wars and proxy wars between imperialists	Imperialist military unity against radical insurgency
National ruling class & national class structure	Growing integration of world into one class structure
Industry restricted to metropolis Third World restricted to producing raw materials	Spread of Industry around the world. Third World rapidly developing but in a “pathological” way as distorted extensions of metropolis.
European settler colonialism promoted to serve as loyal strongholds of euro-capitalism: i.e. U.S.A., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Kenya, Argentina, South Afrika, ‘Israel,’ Algeria, “Rhodesia,” etc. <i>Settlers becoming new class.</i>	With decolonization and integration of native petty-bourgeoisie into Western capitalism, white settlers anachronistic and slowly being abandoned as French Algeria, “Rhodesia,” and settler Kenya have been. <i>Desettlerization.</i>

u.s. defined as white male nation. All other cultures defined as alien, marginal—or criminal.	u.s. redefined as “multi-cultural,” with everyone having a unique minority identity besides being “American”—even white men.
Women colonized everywhere european capitalism ruled.	Trend of women in metropolis being neo-colonized (legal equality) while neo-colonial men in most of the world urged to improve their lot by stepping up the colonization of “their” women. <i>Violence against women up worldwide.</i>
Black Nation was white amerikkka’s most valuable economic asset, (held as colony for 400 years)	Black Nation a liability, too dangerous. Being rapidly decolonized by adopting some middle class into amerikkka and genocide for the rest (replaced economically by new Third World population transfer).
Rule of finance capital Economic crises resolved by periodic bloodletting, cycles of boom and depression.	Rule of finance capital Managed trade and competition not able to halt gradual slide into world economic crisis. Unclear resolution.

A transformation of such magnitude did not go unnoticed by revolutionaries, although there was a strong tendency to interpret the neo-colonial changes as mere trickery, as cosmetic changes. We greatly underestimated the massive class changes about to happen. We knew there would be a few Toms and Tomasinas, some bribed or

But revolutionary socialism had given the Vietnamese revolution powers of social organization and military science more advanced than the abilities of Western armies. After months of tightening encirclement and attrition, in 1954 the fortress of Dien Bien Phu fell. Thousands of defeated French officers, Foreign Legionnaires, and paratroopers (and one woman nurse) were in Vietnamese loser camps. It was colonialism’s best-publicized body-blow since Little Big Horn. The whole colonized world could see what it meant.

In Algeria, the Black psychiatrist from Martinique turned liberation theorist and teacher, Frantz Fanon, saw the rippling effects. While desperately trying to hold on to its valuable Algerian colony (home to one million French settlers holding down nine million Arab and Berber Algerians), France was forced to begin decolonizing elsewhere.

Everywhere, anti-colonial movements were being born to fight them. A French nation hard-pressed to hold Algeria, that was drafting seven hundred thousand unenthusiastic French teenagers, that had recalled older reservists, and that had desperately stripped its NATO forces of entire tank divisions to rush to Algeria, could not even imagine fighting wars in twenty other colonies as well. (Che Guevara’s call in the 1960s for “two, three, many Vietnams” was a statement of anti-colonial experience).

“A colonized people is not alone,” Fanon wisely, wrote. “Since July, 1954, the question which the colonized peoples have asked themselves has been, ‘what must be done to bring about another Dien Bien Phu? How can we manage it?’ Not a single colonized individual could ever again doubt the possibility of a Dien Bien Phu; the only problem was how...This is why a veritable panic takes hold of the colonialist governments in turn. Their purpose is to capture the vanguard, to turn the movement of liberation towards the right, and to disarm the people: quick, quick, let’s decolonize. Decolonize the Congo before it turns into another Algeria. Vote the constitutional framework for all Afrika...but for god’s sake let’s decolonize quick.”

Nor was this the only pressure forcing France’s stiff neck to bend. A

the spirit of Bandung is already underway. To it, we must seek the adherence on an increasingly formal basis of our Latin American brothers.”

A year after these well-intentioned words were written, Nkrumah was overthrown by the state he himself had led. After the military coup of Feb. 24, 1966, while Nkrumah was on route to Beijing for a state visit, there was talk of C.I.A. “dirty tricks.” It was true that the local C.I.A. station had worked with the coup plotters (British-trained Afrikan officers), but it was also true that for three days afterwards the streets of Accra were crowded with thousands of celebrating students, market women, Ashanti “tribalists,” freed political prisoners, and others.

The coup was made by the state apparatus and the new privileged class of corrupt Afrikan bureaucrats and businessmen, who succeeded in “unifying” their nation by sticking Nkrumah with the blame for the growing exploitation and political repression by the state. Even if people had wanted to fight off the coup it would have been hard, since in the name of unity and strengthening the state, Nkrumah had disarmed the population (*not* an Afrikan tradition), imprisoned critics of the new elite, and nationalized people’s organizations, like unions that threatened the state’s monopoly on power. Nkrumah had been the victim of the new ruling class and the new state that he himself had helped build.

By then, it was an established fact that under u.s. leadership the imperialist world was changing over to a neo-colonial structure. After Dien Bien Phu in 1954 it became a panic, a landslide of decolonization. Engaged in a losing guerrilla war since 1945 in its Vietnam colony, the French military sought a decisive engagement to turn the tide at its fortress of Dien Bien Phu. It planned to use that isolated base as a lure, to draw in entire regiments and divisions of the communist Vietnamese Liberation Army onto a technological “killing field.” While the French appeared to be trapped, their napalm airstrikes and heavy artillery would decimate the supposedly cowardly Vietnamese, who would at last be lured into “stand and fight”—or so the French generals fantasized.

sell-outs, but we never thought imperialism would bring millions and tens of millions of Third-World people into its middle-class structures worldwide.

Anti-colonial revolutionaries were also too accustomed to dealing with neo-colonialism as a part of the colonial system (just as today there are still many colonial situations remaining within the larger neo-colonial context). Folks didn’t see how it was becoming the dominant reality itself—or how qualitatively different that reality would be.

There were always situations in the colonial era when euro-capitalism was unable to annex a people as an outright colony (usually during a capitalist transfer of power), and therefore they were allowed to become an independent nation but under indirect control of one power or another. The Latin American nations, which were once colonies of Spain and Portugal, are the classic case. When the local settler bourgeois, led by the nation-maker Simon Bolivar, decided in the early 1800s to be the bosses over the Indian slaves and serfs themselves, England and the young u.s.a. gave them arms and other aid to revolt against Spain. It was simple capitalist rivalry.\* In their cradle

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\* In the colonial era, it was the rule for euro-capitalist nations to try and weaken each other by supporting dissident forces in each other’s colonies. Which is why monarchist France sent its ships and soldiers to aid the slavemaster-general George Washington, in his “democratic” revolt against the British empire. The kingdom of Dahomey was able to stay independent of French colonialism until virtually the end of the 19th century, when the rest of West Afrika had fallen, not only because of its large military (whose heart was an elite corps of 5,000 amazons) but because wily King Behanzin had obtained modern rifles, some cannons, and even military specialists from France’s rival, Germany.

After having defeated the French several times, Dahomey was only conquered in 1892 when France sent its Afrikan Senegalese battalions, expert at rifle and machine-gun, led by its greatest commander, the black general Alfred Dodds. Even the courage of Dahomey’s amazon warriors, who fought their way to the black French ranks against machine-gun fire, could not prevail against “the discipline and the marksmanship of the Senegalese sharpshooters.” Then, as now, only Afrikan men could conquer Afrikans for euro-capitalism.



these “Latin” nations were neo-colonies of first the British empire and then the u.s. empire. One modern advantage that u.s. imperialism had in the 20th century was that it was committed to expansion overseas primarily through neo-colonies.

By the 1960s it had become clear that imperialism, on the defensive before the anti-colonial uprisings, was committing itself to neo-colonialism. More than anyone else, it was the political leaders of the Afrikan revolution—in particular Frantz Fanon of the French colonies of Martinique and Algeria, Kwame Nkrumah of the British colony of Ghana, and Amilcar Cabral of the Portuguese colonies of Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands—who began in their own ways to confront this new development.

Kwame Nkrumah, called Osagyefo (“Liberator”) for leading the first national movement to gain independence in black Afrika, wrote a study of neo-colonialism in 1965: *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. Nkrumah later recalled in exile that the u.s. government “reacted sharply.” An official protest by G. Mennen Williams, u.s. assist. secretary of state for Afrikan affairs, ended ominously: “The government of the United States actually therefore holds the government of Ghana fully responsible for whatever consequences the book’s publication may have.” Years later Nkrumah said: “It is very significant that of all my books, *Neo-Colonialism* is the only one which caused a government to register a formal protest.” And perhaps more than a mere protest. In that he warned:

“The neo-colonialism of today represents imperialism in its final and perhaps its most dangerous state. In the past it was possible to convert a country upon which a neo-colonial regime had been imposed—Egypt in the 19th century is an example—into a colonial territory. Today this process is no longer feasible. Old-fashioned colonialism is by no means entirely abolished. It still constitutes an Afrikan problem, but it is everywhere on the retreat. Once a territory has become nominally independent it is no longer possible, as it was in the last century, to reverse the process. Existing colonies may linger on, but no new colonies will be created. In place of colonialism as the main

instrument of imperialism we have today neo-colonialism.

“The essence of neo-colonialism is that the state which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside.”

This simple definition of neo-colonialism, that of “indirect rule,” is generally accepted now. From his perspective as an anti-colonial leader and ruler, Nkrumah was led by that understanding to the view that these external neo-colonial manifestations could be defeated by strengthening and solidifying the Afrikan state, backed by the strongest unity of all Afrikans. Nkrumah saw full Pan-Afrikanism—the literal merger of the entire Black continent under one state so strong as to shrug off outside intervention—as the ultimate answer to neo-colonialism:

“The surging popular forces may still be hampered by colonialist legacies, but nonetheless they advance inexorably.

“All examples prove beyond doubt that neo-colonialism is *not* a sign of imperialism’s strength but rather of its last hideous gasp. It testifies to its inability to rule any longer by old methods. Independence is a luxury it can no longer afford to permit its subject peoples, so that even what it claims to have ‘given’ it now seeks to take away.

“This means that neo-colonialism *can* and *will* be defeated. How can this be done?

“Thus far, all the methods of neo-colonialists have pointed in one direction, the ancient, accepted one of all minority ruling classes throughout history—*divide and rule*.

“Quite obviously, therefore, *unity* is the first requisite for destroying neo-colonialism. Primary and basic is the need for an all-union government on the much divided continent of Africa. Along with that, a strengthening of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Organization and